



## **Seattle Olmsted Legacy Task Force Meeting Minutes April 25, 2018**

### **Olmsted Legacy Task Force Members**

#### **Present:**

Tom Byers (Seattle Board of Park Commissioners) – **Co-chair**  
Doug Luetjen (Friends of Seattle Olmsted Parks) – **Co-chair**  
Andy Mitton (Friends of Seattle Olmsted Parks) – Member  
Jenifer Rees (Friends of Seattle Olmsted Parks) – Member  
Don Harris (National Association of Olmsted Parks) – Member  
Jennifer Ott (Volunteer Park Trust) – Member  
Jeremy Wood (Seattle Human Rights Commission) – Member  
Dewey Potter (Park District Oversight Committee) – Member  
Zoe Kasperzyk (Associated Recreation Council) – Member  
Nyah Curcuruto (Teen Representative) – Member  
Mark Jaeger (Seattle Public Utilities) – Member  
Lyle Bicknell, (Office of Planning and Community Development) – Member  
Danyal Lotfi (SPR Community Engagement Advisor) – Facilitator

#### **Excused:**

Ed D'Alessandro (Seattle Youth Soccer Association) – Member  
Eugenia Woo (Historic Seattle) – Member  
Susan McLaughlin (Seattle Department of Transportation) – Member

### **Seattle Parks and Recreation Staff**

Danyal Lotfi, Community Engagement Advisor  
Susanne Rockwell, Interim Planning Manager  
Robert Stowers, Director of Parks and the Environment Division  
Jon Jainga, Natural Resources Unit Interim Manager

The meeting was held at 100 Dexter Avenue North and was called to order at 6:30PM. The Task Force members started by introducing themselves.

Susanne Rockwell, the SPR Interim Planning Manager, presented to the Task Force on [the Gap Analysis maps](#) produced through the creation of the [2017 Parks and Open Space Plan](#). These maps can be used to review information about location of Seattle parks, residents' access to our green spaces, walkability and its gaps, equity and health, income and poverty, as well as density. This data was gathered with help from Seattle Department of Transportation (SDOT), Seattle Public Utilities (SPU), Seattle Department of Construction and Inspection (SDCI), Office of Planning and Community Development (OPCD) and the King County Department of Health.

By left clicking on different parts of the map, you may view additional details about that district. On the Equity and Health map, the different areas of the City are scored on a scale of 1-30, with 30 indicating a high need community in terms of Equity and Health. Similarly, the Income and Poverty gives you access to data on the neighborhood's income levels. The Density tab of the map shows expected density considering building permits awarded by the City through two years from the publication of the report. This information may be useful for the Task Force in determining what areas of the City it would like to expand desired Olmsted design elements to, and how to achieve this goal in an equitable manner, considering social, economic and geographical factors.

Co-chair Byers noted that there's often a misconception that a large portion of equity issues that Seattle faces, are focused in the South end of the city. Whereas the data shows that in North Seattle neighborhoods like Lake City and Bitter Lake we're witnessing an increase in low income and immigrant communities.

Susanne Rockwell pointed to page 115 of the 2017 Parks and Open Space Plan for a list of Park Classifications, which are driven by park use, purpose and size. This section of the Plan lists definitions and qualifications for each of these classifications. The classification that may be of special interest to the Olmsted Legacy Task Force is the "Boulevards/Green Streets/Greenways," many of which are part of the Olmsted plan.

When asked about areas of the City that SPR is looking for expansion and creation of new parks, Susanne pointed to SPR's long term acquisition strategy on page 82 of the Parks and Open Space Plan. However, co-chair Byers noted that in addition to plans for acquisitions, the Task Force should also look at opportunities on already-existing public land, such as lidding Seattle Public Utilities' reservoirs. Co-chair Luetjen requested that SPR, based on the gap analysis maps, provide recommendations on gaps in the city where neighborhoods lack Olmsted designed, recommended or inspired parks and boulevards.

Robert Stowers, SPR's Director of Parks and the Environment, and Jon Jainga, SPR's Natural Resources Unit Interim Manager, led a discussion with the Task Force about maintenance challenges in upkeeping Seattle's parks, especially our Olmsted parks. Robert pointed to the use of non-native and invasive plants by the Olmsteds as well as the difficulty and cost of acquiring the Olmsted designed furniture as examples of major challenges in maintaining the Olmsted parks. Later in the meeting, the co-chairs, as well as other Task Force members, clarified that in their experience, it's in fact not too difficult or expensive to acquire Olmsted designed park furniture. Task Force facilitator Danyal Lotfi will work with the Task Force and Robert Stowers to identify the discrepancy in park furniture cost findings.

Historical landmark status of some of these parks adds to these challenges, making it more difficult to make changes or perform maintenance work in these parks. Jon Jainga also pointed to the impacts of the changing climate on our trees, especially the non-native trees that have been enduring difficult journeys due to long dry periods followed by heavy wet periods. He believes that a vegetation plan that incorporates more tolerant and native trees into our park system is a factor the Task Force should consider. Non-native plants, and their expansion, also have considerable negative impacts on our native species.

To better understand the Task Force's budgetary limits, co-chair Luetjen asked that Robert Stowers share with us numerical information on SPR's maintenance budget, specifically the amount of

money a) needed to maintain Olmsted parks as opposed to b) the actual funding allocated for this maintenance work based on the current city budget.

Co-chair Byers inquired about the involvement of the Seattle Conservation Corps in addressing management of invasive species. He believes that because the Conservation Corps has been a successful force in maintaining our city's green spaces, he recommends that the Task Force consider partnerships with this organization in the future, depending on the final recommendations of the Task Force. When asked about examples of other communities and cities who are facing similar challenges in maintaining Olmsted parks and their strategies for addressing it, Task Force member Jennifer Ott pointed to Buffalo, New York. She explained that the City of Buffalo channeled their maintenance funding to the Buffalo Olmsted Parks Conservancy, who took responsibility for maintaining the Olmsted parks. The wading pool in Buffalo, NY, is a good example, where due to the high cost of maintaining and rehabilitating the very large pool, the Conservancy decided to lid it and use it as an ice skating rink in the winter, a splash pool in the summer and a simple reflecting pool during fall and spring, where just a skim coat of water is maintained in the pool. This strategy seems to have pros and cons, however. The Conservancy has gone to great lengths to create public/private partnerships in order to raise private funds to match the city funding in maintaining the Olmsted parks. It also, however, seems that as the Conservancy takes on more responsibility for the maintenance of these parks, the City's involvement is rolled back, resulting in decreased funding and increased City dependence on the Conservancy.

In the final portion of the Task Force meeting, Jenifer Rees and Andy Mitton of FSOP (and members of the Task Force), led a discussion on the elements of the Olmsted design that the Task Force would like to export to the parks and parts of the city that have not benefitted from Olmsted design elements. Task Force member Mitton referenced one of the main philosophies of the Olmsted firm, which was to find opportunities to integrate parks and open spaces with "bleak" urban infrastructure of cities after the Industrial Revolution. The city officials intentionally brought the Olmsted firm to Seattle with the goal of making the city a more livable place for all, and this philosophy of the Olmsted firm made them an appropriate candidate for planning Seattle's park system.

Referring to the 6 key elements of the Olmsted design (Unified Composition, Sustainable Design/Environmental Conservation, Genius of Place, Orchestration of Movement, Comprehensive Approach, and Orchestration of Use), Task Force member Mitton emphasized that, for example, the existence of plants, lighting fixtures and benches is more of a key factor as opposed to the **exact type** of plants, fixtures or benches. This may be especially helpful as the Task Force determines how to replace non-native and invasive species, which the Olmsteds may have had in their plan, with native species that are easier to maintain and are more sustainable in this environment. This also allows for some flexibility if, and when, Seattle may find it difficult to purchase specific Olmsted design park furniture. It is important for Task Force members to be more conscious of the **intent** of the Olmsted design philosophy instead of being solely concerned with the specific type of furniture at these parks. Some Task Force members also suggested including the creation of a schedule to regularly review the condition of Olmsted parks and boulevards in the

final recommendations of the Task Force. The Task Force will revisit this when drafting recommendations.

Co-chair Luetjen inquired about the existence of a set of maintenance standards for Olmsted parks. Task Force member Don Harris discussed an overall maintenance standard that exists within SPR for maintenance of parks and buildings in general, but none specifically for Olmsted parks. Multiple members suggested that the creation of a set of guidelines specific to Olmsted parks would be beneficial to maintaining the legacy of the Olmsted brothers.

At 8:15PM, the co-chairs paused to allow time for public comment. However, due to lack of any community members present to comment, the Task Force returned to discussion at hand.

Task Force member Mark Jaeger emphasized the importance of considering climate change as we plan for the future of the Olmsted legacy in Seattle and ensuring that we use plants that are resilient and will be sustainable in this environment. Task Force member Mitton reiterated the same point and added that the introduction and spread of non-native species to the area was not entirely because of the Olmsteds. For example, the Olmsteds did introduce specific non-native species along Lake Washington Boulevard in preparation for the Alaska-Yukon-Pacific Exposition. Because of a short planning and development phase for this Boulevard, which was seen as the main path to the AYP Exposition on the grounds of the University of Washington, they wanted the road to look green and lush before tourists' arrival. This led to the usage of certain non-native plants that would grow quickly and produce this desired outcome. However, non-native and invasive species continue to be sold at local plant nurseries as well as, for example, Washington State Department of Transportation using Scotch Broom along our freeways, because they stabilize slopes well. With that being said, Task Force member Mitton believes that today it should be fairly easy to replace these non-native and invasive species with native plants that address the original Olmsted **intent** but are more efficient and easier to maintain.

Referencing the "2-for-1" tree policy of the City of Seattle, which directs all City departments to replace every tree removed from City property with two new trees, co-chair Byers suggested that the Task Force may look at opportunities to plant the new replacement trees along our trails and boulevards that have room for more green growth.

The meeting was adjourned at 8:30PM.